

SOCIAL ELEMENT IN THE NOVELS
OF
GEORGE ELIOT

by
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A thesis submitted to the Department of English
and the Faculty of the Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Master's Degree.

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P R E F A C E

I had several reasons for choosing this subject. One was that I have always deeply admired George Eliot and her writings. The other was that I have found Sociology an intensely interesting subject. Professor Whitcomb suggested combining the two, so I readily followed his suggestion.

At first I rather doubted as to whether I might be able to find enough social material to work out this subject, but this doubt was very soon dispelled. After I began my study of George Eliot, with the social side in view, I soon discovered that my chief difficulty was not in the scarcity of material but in the quantity; the difficulty of deciding what to eliminate and what to insert.

I have not attempted to exhaust the social material of her novels, but merely have chosen what I considered of most interest and value. As far as I know this thesis is the first endeavor to take up her numerous phases of social life and give a concrete analysis of it.

I wish to thank Professor Whitcomb and Professor Dunlap for their help and interest shown in the preparation of this thesis.

Margaret E. Opperman

CHAPTER ONE.

HOME AND FAMILY LIFE.

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The Influence of Her Environment
upon Her Writings.

George Eliot's or Marion Ann Evans' birthplace was at South Farm, a mile from Griff, England. She grew up in this midland country where the good old fashioned agriculture and Tory element was just beginning to feel encroachments of manufacturing towns, but had not yet lost the rural characteristics. Mr. Cross¹ says of her, "Her roots were down in the pre-railroad, pre-telegraphic period, the days of fine old leisure, but the fruit was found during an era of extraordinary activity in scientific discovery."

Her father was a Tory of the best type, conscientious in his business, thorough in his work, naturally conservative. She has represented him in Adam Bede² and Caleb Garth.³ Her mother was a shrewd practical woman, with a dash of Mrs. Poyser's⁴ wit.

Her true intellectual development began during her life at Coventry, after her brother's marriage. There she came in direct contact with town life, with the eager restless spirit of the artisan, the dissatisfaction of the laborer and with religious skepticism.

1 Husband of George Eliot.

2 Adam Bede.

3 Middlemarch.

4 Adam Bede.

It is my purpose in this chapter to show to what an extent her own surroundings and environment provide valuable social material for her later writings and novels. She undoubtedly was a very keen observer, and she absorbed and retained all the knowledge which she gained from her personal observation of rural life. It is quite wonderful, the keen grasp she had on social life, in its religious, political and industrial aspects, when one considers how really self-made she was.

Though she did receive a somewhat elementary education at Coventry, it is after she leaves school that the brilliancy of her mind becomes so apparent. She was always a wide reader and for a number of years after leaving school she devoted her entire time to reading and study. She took up the study of Latin, Greek, German, French, philosophy, psychology, etc., in a very systematic manner. It is difficult to see where her education could have been improved upon even if she had attended a university. She was thrown in contact with some of the greatest minds of the times and could not help being influenced by such association. Especially would such a nature as George Eliot's be influenced, who was so keenly alert and forever grasping for broader knowledge. She is alert to the life about her. The rural, provincial society in which she grew to womanhood, though having a narrowing influence, could not be said to have had that influence upon George Eliot, for she had too firm a hold on life to be thus hampered by the disadvantages which these conservative Englishers had to cope with at the time.

Her origin and surroundings thus account for the conservative element in her, the expression of which crops out in all her books from the opening of "Scenes of Clerical Life", where she says, "Mine I fear is not a well regulated mind: it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses; it lingers with a certain fondness over the days of nasal clerks and top-booted parsons, and has a sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors," to "Looking Backward" in Theophrastus Such". The fine eulogy at the close of the third chapter in Adam Bede, on "Fine Old Leisure", was no doubt prompted by the feeling she expresses as "Theophrastus Such". "To me, however, that paternal time, the time of my father's youth, never seemed prosaic, for it came to my imagination first through his memories, which made wonderful prospective to my little world of discovery." The love of the old and aversion to change, link her with her countrymen. The average Englishman of the middle of the century had his origin in such communities as those described in "Adam Bede", "Silas Marner", "Felix Holt" and "The Mill on the Floss". Both the beauty and the narrowness of this life is reflected from her novels; the beauty especially in "Adam Bede" and the narrowness in "The Mill on the Floss".

Her middle class birth makes her representative of a numerous class of Englanders. The well-to-do farmer, the intelligent artisan, and tradesman form the bulk of her characters. The very aristocratic, or the very poor, enter upon her pages, but very infrequently. In this, she is in perfect sympathy with her age. The great struggles

of the century had been to emancipate this middle class and place them socially on the level with the highest.

Home Life.

A fine old trait that is inherent in George Eliot is the love of home. In all her writings she makes prominent the soothing strengthening influence of home life, the sacredness of love and home duties. Even in Mrs. Poyser, does George Eliot exalt home life - "Though she thus chased her landlord before her like a turkey cock; she made Poyser happy and dealt kindly with all at home. Great is the skill with which George Eliot softens the picture for us, with continual touches of love, by giving to this woman the cheery little Totty , "blooming sunnily, coaxed and indulged in the atmosphere of all that well wielded authority" and by making the gentle dissenter, quiet Dinah Morris, an orphan dependent on the tenderness of a disposition always strict, but never stern.

George Eliot, "by living a great deal among people more or less commonplace" comes to the conclusion that among these simple, conventional people, true family spirit and devotion is manifested. It is only when the perfect peace of home life is engendered, and the harmony of the home is broken, that the social life in general deteriorates.

Marriage.

Marriage is treated by her as the chief event in the woman's career, since it determines the character of her daily influences and surroundings. She tries to bring out the fact that the enduring partnership it forms, not only binds together two individual lives, but the fixed home it creates, allies them to society at large. By giving them broader responsibilities, it broadens their outlook upon life. It either cramps the individual by its close and perpetual companionship, or awakens it to a stronger, more worthy life. Her marriages are the world's way, and by the world's advice. She seeks to bring out the idea that as long as humanity seeks not only its own good, but that of its fellowmen, then society has a direct interest in these attainments. If society exerts her power, by employing her institutions, customs, and prejudices, in crushing the individual, then the whole structure of society is faulty, for instead of strengthening the individual, it only crushes and debases it.

Nearly all of her later novels show the evil outcome of every marriage, which is not based upon mutual love, and a proper correspondence in age, condition and mental and moral attainments, joined with a genuine respect for each other's differing talents and aims. A very good example of the failure in marriage is brought out in "Middlemarch". Dorothea's social world acknowledged the unfitness of her marriage, but does not strenuously interfere owing to the fact that the aged unlovely man

whom she consents to wed is possessed of the requisite competence, good breeding and family connections. For herself she is led to cherish the belief that by aiding him in his historical studies and authorship, she can find the opportunity she seeks for helping on some great beneficent work. We later find her baffled after all her endeavors and hopelessly despairing of realizing her ideals. At last she abandons her dreams for the betterment of humanity and ends her days in resigned acceptance of a petty good. Lydgate¹ is also hampered and crushed by his social environment.

It is Rosamond, his wife who proves fatal to the attainment of the one cherished aim that redeems to some extent the worldliness of his nature. This aim is the desire to do something for the advancement of medical science, while assisting in the maintenance of a well ordered public hospital. With her narrow intellect and resolute will, Rosamond is able to checkmate all his endeavors toward a higher, more unselfish career. Regarding worldly success as the only good to be sought, she holds him to what she considers his best interests and thus rescues him from what according to her idea is no better than absurd frenzies. When at last Lydgate finds himself in sore need of funds for the hospital, and where unjust suspicion against his professional honor, which even his wife shares, cuts him to the quick. Dorothea comes forward, as a distant friend, to tender the material

aid he requires, but what is better, to give him confidence in himself and to endeavor to get other people to give him his deserts. It is then he had a glimpse of what such a wife might have been to his life. "A man can make a friend of her", he says, and "Well her love might help a man more than her money". And such a marriage would have been a saving strength and inspiration. In his subordinating his profession and aiming at a higher mission of contributing to the human knowledge and thereby lessening human ills, his purpose and ambition in life would have been satisfied. Rosamond was perpetually nagging at Lydgate and resisted him quietly, but obstinately in all his plans. If he had married Dorothea, instead of Rosamond, she would have bountifully supplied him with fervid sympathy and enthusiasm. As it was in the end he was forced to relinquish his purpose altogether and to die in middle age, worn out by struggles and despair, a successful physician according to his wife's standard, a wretched failure according to his own.

Maggie in "The Mill on the Floss" becomes an outcast from home and disowned by the brother whom she passionately loves. She determines her passion for Stephen Guest must be sacrificed to her duty to her cousin, who is engaged to him. She leaves Guest, after they have spent one night on board a steamer. She returns to the mill, is discarded by her brother as disgraced, and put under the ban of all the outraged re-

spectabilities of St. Ogg, who would have forgiven the elopement, if followed by a marriage, but are scandalized by a self-denial, they can neither understand nor believe. It is very striking that George Eliot compromises her heroine, but does not commit her to the breach of any of those positive social rules, for which she seems to have small esteem.

The novel "Romola" has for its main theme the relations between the sexes as a moral question and it is set forth much in the colours of the twentieth century. We have the conflict between the faithful allegiance to filial duty on the part of Romola and a flagrant disregard of filial duty on the part of her husband. The ultimate failure of all those whom she frames for success, those whom the world really have need of, is made to result, partly from deficient education, partly from the opposition of well meaning friends, but more than anything else, from the unfortunate marriage which society has discouraged or allowed.

Family Life in General.

The Garths,¹ Bedes,² Tullivers,³ Dodsons,⁴ all present admirable examples of family life in George Eliot. Caleb Garth, as also Mr. Tulliver, George Eliot seems to endow with many characteristics of her father. Both are conservative, easy going, slow to anger, and exceptionally good to their families. Mr Tulliver's

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- 1 Middlemarch
 - 2 Adam Bede
 - 3 The Mill on the Floss
 - 4 The Mill on the Floss

whole nature is changed after he loses his fortune. He becomes moody and melancholy, responsive to no one but Maggie. I do not believe there is anything so true and so affecting in her novels as the love of old Tulliver for his "little wench", his "Magsie", the only one in the family who could sympathize with him, who ruined himself by an extravagance so hostile to the prosaic prudent Dodsons (Mrs. Tulliver's relations) who never did a foolish thing and hardly ever a wise one.

The manner in which Maggie grows up leaning on that somewhat lonely father, the mutual and yet inarticulate understanding which exists between them, is one of the finest conceptions anywhere to be found. Mrs. Tulliver fails utterly to understand her wild impulsive Maggie, and it is to Tom, who she says is like the Dodsons, that she looks to for everything. The beauty of the early pictures of mill life, the children among the pigeons, the chickens and calves, the quarrels between Maggie and Tom, their misunderstandings and Maggie's ambition, the great ambition of girls to be the associate of her brother's amusements, all show a wonderful observation of family life, and especially of children. The Dodsons are typical characters. They are contracted, ignorant, full of prejudices and ready to anger, yet governed by a code of traditionary morality, with a completeness that does not admit of their questioning anything that has been customary in their family which has for generations been respectable, according to their own notions of respectability. They represent a great class of people in the modern world of today; that over-

whelming self-esteem, which is so ridiculous, when compared with the qualities on which they pride themselves; yet lies at the root of all the good qualities they possess. George Eliot has a keen insight into character when she makes Mrs. Glegg, who has always declared that Maggie would come to no good, yet offer her a home when all the world has turned their backs upon her, on the ground that those who spoke ill of the Dodsons' blood, had better be well advised before they brought their remarks to her door. The true mother love of Mrs. Tulliver does make its appearance when Tom turns Maggie away from his home and the mother then says it is her duty to go with her daughter, even then though, I think it should be duty which should be emphasized, for she does not then try to sympathize with Maggie or understand her. As a child, Maggie's affectionate disposition was a constant torment to herself for want of sympathy, those about her; after her father's misfortunes, when no joy could enter that sad and anxious household, she is thrust back upon herself and tries in the absence of all companionship in that hunger after happiness, so natural to the young, to find a substitute in mystical religion that answers to none of her longing desires. I have read nowhere of a child's life pictured so pathetically and so truly as Maggie in "The Mill on the Floss". Nowhere is the influence of the child upon the life of man so true, as in "Silas Marner". After Silas loses faith in man, money takes man's place, but the child Effie gradually draws Marner's hope and joy beyond the money and gradually

awakens the love of Silas for humanity and faith in the divine, bringing him to a natural return to community life. There is a reciprocal influence, for Effie, the orphan baby becomes a gainer, as much as does Silas, the weaver.

Duty of Child to Parent.

Filial devotion of the child can be found in Mary Garth¹ and especially Romola². Romola seeks to aid her father in his mental needs, rather than to accomplish anything for herself or the world at large. Moral integrity and single hearted devotion to filial duty is chiefly what she represents. This duty assumes something of a sacred aspect from the nature of the trust received from her dying husband. This is nothing less than the transfer to his native city for public uses, of the rich and valuable library which cost him a lifetime to collect. Mary Garth takes care of caustic old Mr . Featherstone, that the small wages may help some in increasing the family account. Esther in "Felix Holt" moves about with her quaint old father with that grace from other times, respecting while she cannot sympathize with his puritan maxims.

Social Mal-adjustments and Causes for It.

Many of the misfortunes which come are brought about by young men, not naturally depraved, but by some chance of circumstances or environment are led into evil

1 Middlemarch.

2 Romola.

The expectation of fortune spoilt Fred Vincy.¹ The Casses² grew up in an undisciplined motherless home. Arthur Donnithorne as a young gentleman of the neighborhood had never supposed that his conduct could be found other than admirable and upright, for was he not taught from his earliest childhood to believe in his own superiority over these ordinary, commonplace people? Thus it is the fault of his training, of the ideals, etc., which had always been instilled into him, rather than inherent wickedness, which brings about the downfall of Hetty. Tito³ is really quite irresistible despite the fact of his villainy. We feel an involuntary protestation arise in our mind against the arbitrary will which thrusts Tito into the way of evil and has no relenting of purpose. We feel that in some sort he is the victim of fate. In the character of Tito, George Eliot is rather pessimistic in her attitude toward circumstances, for she makes most of her characters strong enough to resist and overcome the forces for evil, as for example, Daniel Deronda and Dinah Morris; but in Tito, though at first he does attempt to resist fate, we feel that there is a force too strong for him to combat against.

- 1 Middlemarch.
- 2 Silas Marner.
- 3 Romola.

Treatment of Caste.

George Eliot seems quite fond of treating the country gentleman type, for all of her novels are represented by at least one if not more. She has left us several good portraits; Sir Christopher Cheveril¹, Arthur Donnithorne², and Arthur's grandfather. But in Squire Cass³ of Raveloe, there is the truest type. Something in reality between a yeoman and gentleman, these men, when there was no great county family in the neighborhood, filled the same place in popular estimation and rather more than the squire's place in their own. Squire Cass farmed his own land but he had tenants under him, besides who complained of the game as if he had been lord. He lived at the chief house in the place, had a tankard older than King George and in short was the aristocrat of Raveloe. But that was only because Raveloe knew no other. He is not simply a gentleman of small estate. George Eliot does not rank him with the Cheverils, the Oldinports, the Sitwells and the Donnithornes, the families who were naturally expected to supply county members and high sheriffs and chairmen of quarter sessions. Yet Squire Cass would probably have been extremely indignant if his claim to the honors of gentility had ever been called in question. This type, strictly honorable in money matters, but a little inclined to be purse proud simply because the public opinion of their circle regarded ability to pay your way the first of human virtue. That charity was an ex-

- 1 Scenes of Clerical Life.
- 2 Adam Bede.
- 3 Silas Marner.

cellent quality in its place, and in their application to other persons, but not for application for themselves. This trait is well brought out in "The Mill on the Floss" through the medium of Tom Tulliver's emotion on hearing of his father's bankruptcy. The consciousness of having money at their back gave all these men great confidence in their opinions and for specimens of dogged obstinacy they are hardly to be surpassed. On the death of old Squire Cass of Raveloe, no one succeeded to his honor. The estate was divided and the village did as well as it could.

George Eliot was always proud of her humble birth and never was envious of those of higher rank, on the contrary, she feels that they are to be pitied rather than envied, for in "Theophrastus Such" she says, "A chief misfortune of high birth is that it usually shuts a man out from the larger sympathetic knowledge of human experience which comes from contact with various classes on their own level." And again, "To look always from overhead at the crowd of one's fellow-men must be in many ways incapacitating, even with the best will and intelligence". And yet society was much more democratic at this time than it is today, or at least than of England of today.

The Woman Movement.

George Eliot became the interpreter of woman's lot as we see it today, and was in advance of her time in regard to the feminine movement. She writes just before all of the needed adjustments of society to the new order of things have been made. The problem of woman's attainments and adjustments furnishes the underlying theme of nearly all of her books. One would imagine her as being a very enthusiastic woman's rights leader if she were living today. I think it is interesting to compare her women with Jane Austen's women. Her type of woman belongs to this century, with their cherished aspirations and ambitions to better their lot, while Jane Austen's women are typical of her times. Their main idea from childhood seemed to be to marry and settle down. The women were educated to believe marriage was their only lot in life. Her women are rather commonplace, not seeking to rise above their environment. George Eliot's women are women of superior intellect who wish to rise above the conventional world in which they live. Marriage to Jane Austen's women was the only lot left for women, unless they wish to remain single, dependent upon their fathers, which indeed was not a very enviable situation. Such a thing as a career was unknown to her women. A woman who had to earn her living was to be pitied, and earning her living was almost impossible, for there were few fields open to a woman. It was felt to be almost a disgrace for a woman to work outside her home.

In George Eliot's time, we begin to see a changing attitude in this regard and in George Eliot's works themselves we see a rapid progress toward the emancipation of women. The career for women became a factor to be recognized. Although a vocation for women was looked upon with disapproval by many, it was not regarded with abhorrence, and such a degradation as in Jane Austen's time. George Eliot herself presents one of the best examples which could possibly be found of a woman working out her own career. She worked against great odds but her perseverance in acquiring knowledge and in the desire for higher equality won the admiration and esteem of the great intellectual minds of the time. In Jane Austen's period, an intellectual woman was disliked and ridiculed, for intellect in a woman was thought of as an attribute altogether unnecessary and undesirable.

The women of both George Eliot and Jane Austen are hampered by lack of education, or by a very meager one, but while Jane Austen's women seem satisfied with their condition, or at least rather submissively acquiesced in the course which society deems fitting for them to pursue, George Eliot's women struggle against the shaping of their career, according to the narrow conventions of the time.

Not only in regard to women was education inadequate, but searching deep into the strata of society George Eliot finds in the absence or narrowness of education a sufficient explanation of sluggish understand-

ings and in consecutive arguments. With scarcely an exception her untaught or half taught personages, set logic at defiance. Her zeal for the elevation of the humbler classes is the more laudable, because she has an extraordinary relish for the picturesque results of satisfied ignorance.

Dorothea¹ is the most admirable woman in George Eliot. Her education is typical of the time, although it is really superior to the majority of women of her time. Thoroughly English in temperament, she is of a higher social rank than Maggie in "The Mill on the Floss", and has received at home and abroad, a more extended and varied education. It is the typical boarding school education of her class; whose inadequacy becomes apparent when she attempts to apply it to her own conduct in life. She is of a philanthropic nature and it is the chief desire of her heart to do some enlightened charitable work, which will be of permanent benefit to those beneath her in social rank.

Dinah in "Adam Bede" has to fight against the prejudices of the times in regard to a woman preacher, but finally she wins the majority to her side, simply by her charm of personality. They could not help but see what an influence for good she had exerted, and yet there were many who stood out against the idea of a woman preacher merely because they considered it was not woman's sphere. But Dinah is not moulded and modified by circumstances as many of George Eliot's women, in fact as nearly

1 Middlemarch.

all of her women are. There is no shifting of her high purpose.

Gwendolen¹ might, if circumstances and opportunities had been favorable, become a good and successful actress. But the prejudices of the gentlewomen and a fondness for elegant ease of private life, lead her to prefer the successes of her social world. With friends as proud and prejudiced as herself, she could only under extraordinary circumstances look to the stage for a career. When these circumstances do arise and duty those dependent on her calls every exertion in her power, we find her seeking for the time to employ her native gifts. Thus is she brought face to face with the problems of her life.

Maggie is the most lovable character. She longs for the education which is wasted upon her brother Tom, naturally very quick to learn, she would have developed a brilliant woman if she had only had the opportunity. As showing the views of the time upon the subject of woman's education, the attitude of Mr. Tulliver in regard to Maggie's intellect, is a fair example. He felt it a shame that all that intellect should be wasted upon a girl and continually bemoaned the fact that she wasn't a man, since she was so much more capable than was Tom. Maggie is a very impulsive and lovable nature. She loves her brother Tom with a passionate ardor. But his narrow, stern nature fails to understand and respond to her love. Her turbulent, responsive nature within itself no power of will firm enough to direct its course. She demands some calmer

1 Daniel Deronda

strength which will supply the guidance of which she stands in need. Thus her mind craves instruction, her heart love, her nature support. All of which we find denied her, by the circumstances of her lot.

Many of her women cultivate with superfluous care their own original narrowness, by shutting themselves up in a circle of family interests, which is but a wider form of selfish isolation. Esther Lyon fails wholly to understand the principle on which Felix has resolved to belong to the working classes, but after some hesitation and with a temporary disposition to favor a rival lover, she yields to the logic of personal attachment and allows her life to be shaped according to his own ideal of nobleness.

Thus we find in all of her novels, women who have been stunted because of their circumstances, in their ambition of seeking a higher good for themselves and for humanity in general.

SUMMARY.

We learn from sociology that the family is the unit of society and in the study of the family we can formulate an idea of the working of society at large. It is in the family we get a minute picture of how our social institutions are organized and developed. Thus in studying the family life in George Eliot, we derive some knowledge of her wide understanding of the inner life of this organization and of her application of this observation and instructive social training to society at large.

I have developed to a greater extent the family life than any of the other phases which I will work out, simply because I think it of the greatest importance, for as I have said previously, the home is the basis of all society, as society is considered in the broadest sense of the word. Of course, it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line between any of the social divisions I have made, because they are interdependent and related to one another.

CHAPTER TWO.

RELIGION.

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RELIGION

George Eliot's Religious Beliefs and Their Reaction
in Her Works.

Religion forms one of the most important social factors in George Eliot. As many of the great writers, George Eliot has been much influenced in her writings by religion. There is not a novel of hers that does not show this influence. Though it is not my purpose here to investigate her ethical beliefs, a brief study of her religious convictions will probably throw a clearer light and give a better understanding of her treatment of the clergymen as a social type, of the church as an institution and the reaction of the people toward religion.

From her early childhood George Eliot showed an enthusiastic interest in religion. She was brought up under religious influences, and early imbibed the evangelistic faith of her parents. No doubt the religious experiences of her girlhood are portrayed in *Maggie Tulliver*¹. As a child she was quite pious and would become very repentant over what she considered her sins. It was not until after she returned from Coventry School, where she stayed until fifteen years of age, that she began to take on her ultra-evangelistic beliefs. By the time she was twenty-one years of age, she became quite skeptical. This was due partly to her associations after leaving Coventry. Her environment at this time was among people of intelligence,

1 The Mill on the Floss.

who though not atheistic in their beliefs, still probed into religious doctrine to such an extent that they became skeptics. She would not attend church at this time, which made her family very bitter against her. George Eliot believed, though she doubted. Her doubt was not due to an antagonism toward religion, but to the fact that she had such an analytical mind that she must have the facts of everything. The proof of why a thing was, must be made known to her. She could not accept a thing simply on faith.

As I have said before, the religious struggles which she underwent are brought out in Maggie in "The Mill on the Floss". I think the following extract gives a good representation of her feelings toward religion: "Some have an emphatic belief in alcohol and seek their ecstasies or outside standing ground in gin; but the rest require something that good society calls 'enthusiasm', something that will present motives in an entire absence of high prizes, something that will give patience and feed human love when the limbs ache with weariness and human looks are hard upon us. Something clearly that lies outside personal desires, that includes resignation for ourselves and active love for what is not ourselves, etc."

She made out a faith for herself without any established authorities or appointed guides. From Thomas a Kempis's simple doctrines, Maggie received the most spiritual help, and it was probably from a like source that George Eliot was religiously benefited, rather than from any high doctrinal sermons by popular clergymen of the day. The most noticeable trait in her religious belief was her deep feeling of self-renunciation. As she says in

"The Mill on the Floss", "People like to take the attitude of martyrdom and endurance, rather than tolerance or self-blame". This seemed to be her own attitude during her girlhood.

Yet one should not try to formulate a set religious doctrine for George Eliot, for she does not seem to have any. She has a large heartedness, which enables her to accord a cordial recognition of opinions and formulas of faith, differing from each other and from her own, without herself lapsing into indifference. This Catholic spirit is constantly manifested in reference to religious doctrine. She nowhere obtrudes her own convictions. She shows a genuine sympathetic appreciation of the religious notions of Adam Bede, who in a rough chaotic sort of way is a free thinker, without knowing it; of the Broad Church doctrine of Mr. Irwine, the generous comfort loving rector of Hayslope, and of the intense Evangelicalism of his successor, Mr. Ryde. Her lingering tenderness for Evangelicalism is shown in loving portrayal of the very ardent Wesleyan, Dinah Morris, and in Mr. Tryan. Although religious in feeling she is antagonistic to all mere piety or anything that savors of hypocrisy. In Mr. Bulstrode¹, a perfect representative of a natural hypocrite, she has entered her protest against the "I am holier than thou religion".

The clergymen as a Social Type.

In George Eliot, the laxity of a clergyman's life did not necessarily impair his influence over the people.

1 Middlemarch.

He was human as they were. If their belief was better than their lives, so was his. His failure to practice what he preached did not make his preaching less true. Not appreciating the spiritual attributes which were supposed to distinguish him from other men, they did not see the vastness of the gulf between what was expected of such a man and what he very often did. They were unwilling to admit that there was any difference between his breaches of the moral law and their own.

Where hunting was the predominant amusement, probably in consequence of the nature of the country, the clergy naturally fell into the ways of their neighbors. George Eliot is in sympathy with the old-fashioned parson instead of making fun of him and making him out the scarecrow, which many writers do. She deals with him, with gentle leniency. In her novels he puts himself more upon a level with his people in their ordinary pursuits, interests and occupations. If he is less the priest, he is more the man. "A clergyman," she says in "Looking Backward", "should feel himself a bit of every class." The practice of this certainly helped toward making him beloved by his parishioners.

That the clergymen looked well to the payment of this tithe, was to be commended, because the parishioners would themselves grow lax in money matters, if they did not have a good example set before them. Especially would this be true, if the parishioners happened to be creditors.

George Eliot always dwells with affectionate minuteness on the peculiarities of the old fashioned parson.

In "Felix Holt" there are two well born specimens of this class. Mr. Debarry being somewhat more refined than his neighbor, Mr. Lyons, George Eliot perhaps rather inclined to Mr. Lyons' revolutionary doctrines on church establishment. It is not surprising that the Tory farmers in the neighborhood were heartily amused by their favorite parson's assumption of a new fangled creed. The old-fashioned parson was an active magistrate, a shrewd farmer, a keen and hearty sportsman. He found his way in these capacities to some hearts which might have remained shut to a higher and more spiritual influence. He could sometimes enter all the better into their commonplace troubles, because he had a share in their commonplace pursuits and amusements. Wherein any was weak, he was weak also. Their spheres had other points of contact beyond the mere relation of priest and parishioner. Mr. Irwine in "Adam Bede" is a country rector of the old and much abused type.

But precedence may be fairly claimed by Dinah Morris¹, the Methodist preacher. She comes from the colder clime of Snowfield, where she works in a cottonmill, in this grim little town. Mrs. Poyser, Dinah's aunt, who is rich in comparison, describes it as "a place where folks live on the naked hills, like poultry, a scratching at a gravel bank." In a humble cottage in the uninviting locality, the orphan girl lives and works, and in her simple way is a ministering angel to the rude and ignorant amongst whom her lot is cast. She has been brought up by her aunt, who was a Wesleyan, an old-fashioned Methodist,

¹ Adam Bede.

in the days when Methodism was young, and had at all events much of what the church in too many quarters greatly lacked, vitality. She paid long visits to her aunt, and was repeatedly urged to stay with her altogether, but her duties at Snowfield constrained her to spend much of her time there. She had a "call" to minister to the spiritual needs of the poor miners of that barren district. She had been used, from the time she was sixteen, to talk to the little children and teach them, and sometimes her heart enlarged to speak in class and was much drawn out in prayer with the sick. Her winning ways and her ardent eloquence gained her followers, and as is natural, her feminine attractiveness, awakened interest. Her prayer and sermon given on the green at Hayslope are strikingly worded, though perhaps given at too great a length. How admirably the stupid apathy of the peasantry is hit off in the following extract, from the description of the gathering to hear Dinah preach: "Now and then there was a new arrival, perhaps a slouching laborer, who having eaten his supper came out to look at the unusual scene with a slow *bovine* gaze, willing to hear what anyone had to say of it, but by no means, excited enough to ask a question."

It is not wonderful, if beneath such spiritual leadership as Parson Jack¹ of little Treby, dissent became a necessity. If men were to have religious leadership and guidance at all, they fitted into the theory of a political church, they made profession of little beyond the faith-

1 Felix Holt.

fulness to an ecclesiastical scheme, framed to keep out the Catholics and keep down the dissenters. Upon this principle the Reverend John Lingon, when the Catholic Emancipation Act and the Reform Bill passed, found himself able to turn radical. "If the mob can't be turned back, a man of family must try and head the mob". So he stands by his radical nephew, Harold Transome. Mr. Lyons's¹ scholastic phrases express more elevated sentiment, but this rather eccentric old clerical gentleman is perhaps a pleasanter object of contemplation.

From the "Scenes of Clerical Life", we become acquainted with many and various types of the village clergy; from the dear old vicar², whom she describes as having "something of the knotted nature of a poor lopped oak, had yet been sketched out, by nature, as a noble tree", to Mr. Tryan³, who awakens poor Janet to a new spiritual life, we have represented not the superior spiritual espounder of Christ, but a servant of Christ who has faults like other men, but their faults only tend to make the reader more sympathetic towards him, for he is attempting to live up to the best that is in him and to render services where he could.

Religion and Its Reaction on the People.

The villagers were not stirred to any great extent by the rather placid sermons which they heard. They were entirely satisfied with themselves, as well as

1 Felix Holt.

2 Mr. Gilfil's Love Story.

3 Janet's Repentance.

the sermons, for these sermons did not probe the conscience very deep. "They did not make any unreasonable demand on the intellect." These rural people applied only the common virtues which fitted their needs. "Mrs. Patlen¹ understood that if she turned out ill-crushed cheese, a just retribution awaited her; though I fear she made no particular application of the sermon on back-biting." Mr. Gilfil's sermons amounted to little more than "an expansion of the concise thesis, that those who do wrong will find it the worse for them and those who do well will find it the better for them."

Among some of the old peasantry there was a trace of the religion of our early ancestors, these primitive people who worshipped demon gods. The ignorant primitive mind with difficulty associates the ideas of power and benignity.

In "Silas Marner" she says, "A shadowy conception of power that by much persuasion can be induced to refrain from inflecting harm, is the shape most easily taken by the sense of the invisible in the minds of men who have always been pressed close by primitive wants, and to whom a life of hard toil has never been illuminated by an enthusiastic religious faith. To them pain and mishap present a far wider range of possibilities than gladness and enjoyment; their imagination is almost barren of the images that feed desire and hope, but is all overgrown by recollections that are a perpetual pasture to fear." Thus there were many of the ignorant gray-haired peasantry, who had grown up with the fear of God and of a religion which they could not conceive of as being for their comfort and happiness.

¹ Mr Gilfil's Love Story.

Caleb Garth¹, a land surveyor, takes keen delight in honest work. Though he lives within his small sphere, up to the full height of Christian purity and charity, his imagination dwells solely on his work of promoting benevolently the thorough cultivation of the land. He only shows his nobility by his benevolence, his integrity, his thoroughness and his charity and not by any vision of a life higher than that of the surveyor and land agent. The author wishes to present to us a character whose ideal is of the purest secularistic type.

Adam Bede is an interesting character, especially in connection with religion, for he shows to what a very small extent he was influenced by religion. He is too intent on fulfilling his own common sense view of daily life and had too strong an appreciation of the importance of attending to those material realities which are the basis of mundane existence and happiness than to occupy himself with vexed questions of religious doctrine and church government. It seemed natural and respectable to go to church as other people did, and he of course looked upon Methodism as a fanatical excitement which his sense of justice called upon him to tolerate, but which his judgment decidedly condemned. In his attitude toward religion, he is in great contrast to his brother Seth, who was more zealous of his spiritual welfare. Seth is quite credulous and is inclined to accept religious doctrine as well as everything else upon simple faith. Seth's religion and his love for Dinah, which George Eliot says was so deep and fine that

1 Middlemarch.

it could hardly be distinguished from religion, are his life. Dinah and Seth, both devoted Methodists, had a literal way of interpreting the Scriptures, which is not at all sanctioned by approved commentators and it is impossible to represent their instruction as liberal but as George Eliot says in "Adam Bede", "It is possible, thank Heaven! to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings," and the truth of this is brought to bear upon the reader, in his study of the character of Dinah and Seth.

A very vivid picture of the church of George Eliot may be found in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" in the description of the interior of Knebley Church. "The farmers' wives and children sate on the dark oaken benches but the husbands usually chose the distinctive dignity of a stall under the twelve apostles, where, when the alternation of prayer and responses had given place to agreeable monotony of the sermon, Paterfamilias might be seen or heard sinking into a pleasant doze, from which he infallibly woke up at the sound of the concluding doxology. And then they made their way back again through the miry lanes, perhaps almost as much the better for this simple weekly tribute to what they knew of good and right, as many a more wakeful and critical congregation of the present day."

That the clergymen did not dispense the pure gospel never entered the thoughts of the parishioners; thus the clergymen were not subject to criticism as they are today. The moral vacuity of the country gentry, amongst whom leniency to the tenants and liberality as regards fencing and draining seem to be the highest moral aims of

which they have any knowledge.

George Eliot is in sympathy with the belief of these common folk, though she cannot seem to accept it without modification for herself. In religion as in everything else, she praises the old and the simple. She could not accept what she considered new fangled thoughts and ideas.

The great wave of skepticism of George Eliot's time has swept past, but from it we see registered the low tide mark of spiritual belief among the literary class of the nineteenth century. George Eliot herself, as we have mentioned before, was of a skeptical mind. A critic of today is compelled to infer from her novels that even during the low ebb of trust in the supernatural element of religion, there was no want of ardent belief in the spiritual obligations of purity and self-sacrifice.

CHAPTER THREE.

POLITICS

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Her Non-Partisan Teaching.

It is a remarkable characteristic of the numerous books on the "Life of George Eliot" which I have read, that in hardly one is there more than a passing allusion to the political sympathies of its subject. And probably this indifference of the biographers to this part of George Eliot's personality has been reciprocated by the reader. The other parts of her character are so much more prominent and distinctive that few turn to contemplate her relation to contemporary politics. Her books, with the exception of "Felix Holt", do not to any great extent, allude to general political problems or to particular measures and controversies. In "George Eliot's Life" by Mr. Cross, although reviewers generally have ignored the fact, there are passages from George Eliot's journals which give us clear indications of her political faith. These remarks on the contemporary politics of her time are necessarily of a somewhat disjointed character and while giving hints, do not reveal to us the whole texture of her political philosophy.

That George Eliot should have sought political truth and have endeavored to influence political thought, is but conformable to the expansiveness of her mind and the wide human sympathy which distinguished her nature. Her intellectual curriculum could not exclude the political problems whose solution presaged a better future for the "common people", for whom she had so much love and sympathy.

It is true that she was removed from the sphere of partisan controversy, that she viewed politics in the same scientific spirit, that she studied psychology and natural science, but nevertheless her influence while perhaps not so large, will be no less noble and beneficent than in the conduct of life. She wrote not as a partisan, but as a philosopher who stood aloof from party quarrels, and who perhaps neither aided nor impeded the success of the various measures of the time, but who strove to inculcate in the minds of the people without regard to the partisan profession or the interested zeal, what she conceived to be calculated most to advance the true interests of a free commonwealth; while she was unfitted and unwilling to quit the sphere of literary culture and philosophic study to espouse in a more marked and active manner movements which, while advancing principles with which she sympathized, had also owing to the current conditions of political life, some aspects wholly repulsive to her refined nature.

Political Reform and Reformers.

Although George Eliot does deal in a rather desultory way with political questions and controversies, in many of her novels, it is from "Felix Holt" that we get a full and clear treatment of politics, as embodying her own beliefs and theories. Therefore, I believe it more profitable in order to gain an adequate idea of the politics during her time, as portraying her own political beliefs, to give almost my entire attention to the study of "Felix Holt". In "Felix Holt", at first reading, we think more of the psychological problems personified in Esther Lyon and Harold Transome, than of the political idealism which imparts such unconventional strength to its hero. Yet a

closer examination of the work and its teachings gives a better understanding of the development of the author's conception, and implants the conviction that "Felix Holt" bears a relation to political and social philosophy as distinct and important as Charles Kingsley's "Alton Locke". In examining George Eliot's political ethics of "Felix Holt", the greatest interest attaches to the individuality of Felix Holt. He accepts Radicalism not as a formula, but as an expression of a duty. He continues in his vocation of repairing clocks and endeavors to bring intellectual light and political morality to the miners of Sproxtton, by meeting them with their pipes and pewters on the Sunday evening at the village ale house. His mind is expansive if not richly cultivated. He has a strong grasp of the actualities of his time, is possessed of a firm purpose and stubborn resolution. He is ardent to assist in bringing about political reforms, but he does not vent his ardor in loud spoken bids for popular notoriety. He regards political reform as necessary for the intellectual elevation and moral amelioration of the condition of the working classes, and as the first thing at hand he makes himself one of the fraternity at the "Sugar Loaf" on the Sunday night.

The character of Felix Holt is not merely the product of the circumstances of the times. George Eliot selects a time of extraordinary and epochal political interest, when the popular passion is just being felt in English political life for her story. But the attributes and characteristics of Felix Holt would have made him a reformer of society and an apostle of labor at any other time. He lives at a time with the main tendencies of which

he is in sincere sympathy. Some of the aspects of its central movement, however he regards with suspicious antagonism. He regards political power for the laborers not as a means of class aggrandisement, but of class elevation. "Extension of the suffrage", he bitterly remarks on returning from an unsatisfactory expedition to the ale house, "will do much good if it means extension of drinking." And the attempts of Johnson, the agent of the Radical candidate, Mr. Transome, to delude and demoralize the miners of Sproxtton by "treating" and fine phrases rouses the indignation of his soul. Toryism then meant wealth to the landlord and ignorance to the poor. It was this injustice and bitter sense of wrong which forms the background, as both cause and fail to the rugged earnestness and nobleness of Felix Holt.

The best and wisest inhabitants of Treby, on the whole, displayed the smallest amount of common sense. Felix Holt, who had been endeavoring to persuade the colliers to send their children to school, is indignant at the attempt at his own party to employ his sluggish disciples for purposes of riot. On the election day he takes command of the riot for the sole purpose of leading the rioters out of mischief and from the same motive, he trips up and accidentally kills a constable who attempts to interfere with proceedings.

In studying this novel, we find much abstract political morality. For although Felix Holt is the leading character, other phases of political thought and action are represented in the persons of Harold Transome, Rufus Lyon and the church vicar; for it was evidently George Eliot's purpose not only to show the pernicious character of politic-

al action in the time of small pocket boroughs and the aristocratic supremacy, but the dangers which unless recognized and counteracted would produce evils hardly less pernicious under a regime of popular power.

Mr. Lingon is amusing in his temporary conversion to Radicalism. On the night of Harold Transome's return, over a second battle of port, Mr. Lingon was not indisposed to persuade himself that Toryism was extinct and that Whiggery was a ridiculous monstrosity. The next day he was less satisfied with his own arguments, but his nephew relieved his scruples by informing him that he was a radical only in rooting out abuses. He is so very conscientious that anything savoring of deceit was extremely distasteful to him.

The political teaching of the book was summarized and emphasized in an article which appeared sometime after its publication in Blackwood's Magazine under the title of "An Address to Working Men" by "Felix Holt". As in the novel, little attention or reference is made to the particular questions occupying public attention, but the tone of the essay is inspired by the measure of reform passed the previous year, 1867. George Eliot here presents for acceptance by the democracy, the same lofty conception of public duty which she has embodied in the character of Felix Holt, while earnestly invoking at the same time that intelligent interest in political questions independent of character and tenacity in resolution which are as necessary to the social advancement of a class by its political power as they are conducive to the stability of the community as a whole. While not wanting in words of warning, a hope-

ful view is taken of the future of democracy, which probably has not been well justified in the last fifty years, if one wishes to take a pessimistic view of the political life of today, but many feel there has been a distinctive political reformation to justify the attitude.

In "Romola" we have a character, Savonarola, who may be compared with "Felix Holt" in that they are both zealous political reformers. His special aim was for liberty and purity of government in Florence, with constant reference of this immediate object to the wider end of a universal regeneration.

From this novel we derive a somewhat confused knowledge of the politics of Florence in the fifteenth century. The great parties which divided the state at the close of the fifteenth century are displayed rather in their thoughts than in their actions. The Florentines regarded Savonarola as a prophet. The corrupt political and church forces are too strong against him. The personal aims and longings for the glory that he thought his due are made to be his ruin and to furnish the road to defeat and death. The renovation of the church and the world came to mean practically the measures that would strengthen his own position in Florence. The comparison of Savonarola with Felix Holt does not now hold good. For although Felix does not succeed in bringing about the full reformation in politics and society which he desired, he never deviated from his path for reform and always lives up to his highest principles.

Political Morality.

George Eliot's political views do not give much

support to the theory which to many appears as a truism, that woman's nature is essentially conservative in its tendencies. It is true that her mind had a skeptical bend in political matters, that she was somewhat of a censor of the formulae of both parties, and that she had little faith in the efficacy of organic changes in the body politically unaccompanied by moral changes in the community. But what her politics lacked in form, they gained in spirit. She was a true Liberal even when she criticised the objects and environments of the Liberal party. If she looked askance on the ballot, it was only because she regarded it as a somewhat clumsy attempt to anticipate by mechanical means that morality in politics, which she believed must be purely spontaneous and therefore of slow growth. Her grasp of questions, her thorough recognition of existing actualities, and an intellect over which neither prejudice nor sentiment could dominate, caused her to regard with scorn the intellectual inertia, false sentiment and positive superstition which constitute the main elements of conservatism. And the more distinctive qualities of the womanly nature - sympathy with wrong, suffering and injustice, always made her a friend to the creed of Radicalism, the creed with which she had inspired Felix Holt.

CHAPTER FOUR.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND ECONOMIC LIFE.

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Social and Economic Contentment

It is remarkable that in none of George Eliot's stories dealing with social life of the village exclusively, do we find a trace of any social discontent or jealousy or misery, no complaints of there being "hard times for the poor", no serious abuse of grasping or unjust landlords. No imputation upon game or game laws, are thought to be essential to truthfulness of a picture of the early eighteenth century. The impression is not brought about by any fancy picture of rural simplicity. On the contrary, vice and crime, and meanness and folly figure freely in her pages. The peculiarity is that they do not seem to mar the whole picture or to disturb the general serenity of the world in which they dwell. The seduction of Hetty Sorrel¹ apparently leaves the popularity of the Donnithornes² where it was before, and the old gentleman's attempt to cheat Mr. Poyser out of the best bit of his farm gives vent to no abuse of "landlordism". The farmers at Knebley grumbled much at Squire Oldinport³, but his conduct produced no heart burnings or real ill will. One can find no indication whatever that the agricultural laborer was either ill-used or discontented. In short, these village scenes, long ago relieved from all the harsher elements of feudalism, still kept its more generous and kindly qualities.

1 Adam Bede
 2 Adam Bede
 3 Silas Marner

I have already referred to old Mr. Donnithorne and his quarrel with the Poyzers, but no impression is thereby created of the general badness of a system under which such things were possible. The intercourse between high and low, between farmer and laborer, was of the most genial and amiable character and even the picture of Mr. Poyser's harvest home is if possible less interesting than that of the supper in the farmhouse kitchen, with master and men sitting down together with an appetite created by labor in which all had shared.

The feudal idea had not altogether disappeared at this time from the more sequestered parts of England and continued to keep the relations between the two classes on a footing satisfactory to both. The sentiment may be stigmatized as servile, but it produced a much more pleasant state of country life than that of today.

Social Customs.

As to the social customs in George Eliot's writings, she goes much into detail in describing the sports, the amusements, ways of dress and many little intricate habits and customs of villagers of the eighteenth century.

The stage coach seems to have been the prevailing means of travel, while there were a few of the villagers who owned their own carriages and coaches, it was only among the gentry that this was possible. The chief means of travel to those parts when the stage coach did not travel was by horseback. The women as well as the men used this means of travel. The picture of Nancy Lammeter¹, seated on the

1 Silas Marner

pillion behind her tall erect riding to a social gathering, presents a quaintly contrasted picture with the maiden of today with her modern demands for luxurious equipments.

As to the amusements of the folk of George Eliot, hunting, as I have mentioned, was the predominant sport among the lower class, as well as the gentry, but especially among the latter. It is at a fox hunt that Dunstan Cass¹ comes to sorrow, kills his brother's horse and somewhat later loses his own life, though the latter does not occur as the result of the hunt.

The important social affairs were those given by the Squire of the village to his tenantry. It was a means of establishing himself more firmly in the regard of his people. Dancing and feasting were the important diversions of these festive occasions. These parties were on a large scale and sometimes lasted a good while, especially in the winter time. The ladies packed up their best frocks in band boxes and prepared for a lengthy stay. For they could not incur the risk of fording streams on pillions, with these precious burdens, for only a brief visit. Thus in the winter weather when there was not much work on hand, several neighbors contrived to keep open house in succession, and the guests would stay a few days at one neighbor's, then go to the next and so on.

Drinking was a common custom at these merry makings, as it was on all other occasions. The village inn was the common resort for drinking and general sociability. It was here that the village scandals were discussed, and

the crops, politics and weather always afforded excellent topics of conversation. The "Rainbow" in Silas Marner is a typical inn of the times. The village gatherings here well represented the superstitions, the ignorance, and wit of an ordinary England village in the eighteenth century.

The mailcoach driver, in the story of Felix Holt, was the general dispenser of gossip. He knew the family skeletons of all the villagers, from the rich to the poor, and cheerfully volunteered all his information to any chance stranger who happened to be driving along with him.

We thus draw the conclusion from George Eliot's treatment of social life, that it was a narrow and constraining life, but on the whole simple and wholesome.

Occupations and Professions.

To be sure the industrial life of the England of George Eliot's time is not that of today. It was an England of few manufacturing towns, and the factories were on a small scale. There were no great industrial corporations and industrial strife and controversy was practically unknown to her.

From her pictures of village life, we become acquainted with the simple, hard working carpenter, knowing little outside the narrow little world in which he lives, but perfectly satisfied with his lot.

Then there is the village landlord, whose occupation was as much respected as any other man's in the village; there is the miller, the shoemaker, the weaver, the blacksmith, the gardener, the farmer, the hired man, the school master, and many more such, skillfully woven into her scenes of rural England.

In her novel Adam Bede, there is Joshua Ram, the zealous parish clerk, Mr. Craig, the Scotch gardener, "who has great lights concerning soils and composts", Bill the stone sawyer, with his difficulties at night school, owing to the letters being all so "uncommon alike, there was no telling 'em one from another". But there is one little hint dashed in at the end of the chapter, which gives an ideal type of the village pessimist, Mr. Sledge, the landlord of the Royal Oak. We may not all of us be fortunate enough to have made the acquaintance of an Adam Bede, but we may all of us have met a Mr. Sledge.

That there existed little jealousies among the professions, then as today, is admirably brought out in "Middlemarch". Dr. Lydgate, the young physician, who attempts to allay human suffering, by his modern appliances of the science and technique of his profession, brings down upon his head many abuses by the old doctors not scientifically trained. They attempt to prejudice their patients against this young upstart, as they consider him, and in many cases are successful in their attempt. It is the jealousy and envy of the older generation against the younger. Though they realize they are not keeping up with the advancement of the medical profession, they are making an effort and will not give up without a struggle.

Medicine began to take its proper place in this period and yet the sale of quack medicine was very common. The perpetual recurrence of Felix Holt's conscientious abandonment of the sale of his father's quack medicine, though kept evidently under restraint, is yet carried too far.

The unprincipled as well as the honest lawyer

figures freely in her pages. The lawyer who was wary enough to do unscrupulous things and yet go unscathed was admired rather than condemned.

Democracy.

From Felix Holt, we get the teaching that "the love of money is the root of all evil." In Felix, George Eliot has embodied her ideal of a working man. He preaches the gospel of labor. He not only calls himself a Democrat, but he lives a Democrat. He resolves to labor for the workmen as one of themselves, not as one who has raised himself above their social value. He is eager to emancipate labor from the thralldom of property and privilege, but he is no less eager to save it from the insidious wiles and self-seeking fawning of shrewd demagogues and astute plutocrats.

Today the middle class Englishers are more accessible to ideas, than in George Eliot's time, but if George Eliot were living today, she could not look for earnest moral and spiritual support from many of the Englishers, for today they are chiefly occupied in social appearances and are politically consolidated by fear of the labor movement and the spread of socialism.

Reluctance to Change.

England of today is better fed, better clothed, better housed, better educated, better governed, and enjoys more comforts of life than those of the rural England of George Eliot, but with all of England's advancement, it is not the contented England of George Eliot's time.

Her novels of rural life "The Scenes of Clerical Life", "Middlemarch," "The Mill on the Floss", and "Silas Marner" ideally represent the England of "Old Leisure".

The reluctance of England to change, she brings out as its chief characteristic. This reluctance to change is borne out in the whole history of England. There has been no violent break, but each succeeding social stage has grown naturally out of the preceding conditions. Commercial changes have brought constitutional changes and constitutional favors in turn have aided commercial growth. There has been no sudden change, each advance on social organization has its distinct cause or set of causes. Change is the law of life; but it is change that is slow and gradual and which comes practically through the almost unconscious action of forces lying deeply buried in human nature.

CHAPTER FIVE.

NATIONALITY AND RACE.

NATIONALITY AND RACE.

George Eliot in her study of nationality and race adheres as closely to fact as she does in all of her other phases of the social element. Indeed she must have made a close and exact study of different nationalities, for critics say her presentation of foreign nature and environment, holds correct both psychologically and sociologically. Before writing *Romola*, she spent several years in Italy studying the Italian race in relation to its environment. Her novel "*Daniel Deronda*" necessitated a thorough knowledge of the Jewish race. She had always been in sympathy with the Jews in their aspirations for a national life. Her novel is not only a vindication of the Jews and condemnation of nations who have been bitterly antagonistic toward the race, but she also set forth the principle of the sacredness of race as embodied in this race.

Nationalism versus Cosmopolitanism.

George Eliot's ideal of national life was in brief, a nation existing apart and separate from other nations, living up to its past memories and traditions. "No nation," she says, "has any right to subject a weaker and smaller country for its own benefit, for the effect¹ of subjection is the rapid effacement of the national genius, the deep suckers of healthy sentiment." Her theory of a nationalized people is most expressively set forth in the last chapter of "*Theophrastus Such*". "The modern Hep! Hep! Hep!" and to a somewhat lesser extent in *Daniel Deronda*. Mordecai², the advocate of a new national state in Palestine,

1 *Theophrastus Such*.

2 *Daniel Deronda*.

51

without doubt, expresses George Eliot's own beliefs and feelings towards the transformation of the Jewish race into a new national life. She feels very deeply on the Jewish question. The wrongs which have been committed against the Jews aroused her just indignation. Mordecai says to Deronda in his attempt to gain Deronda's help and to instill in him the sacredness of the cause of nationality for the Jews. "You shall take the inheritance it has been gathering for ages. You will take the inheritance which the base son refuses because of the tombs which the plow and harrow may not pass over or the gold seeker disturb; you will take the sacred inheritance of the Jews," and "The heritage of Israel is beating in the pulses of millions; it lives in their veins as a power without understanding like the morning exultation of herds in the in-born half of memory moving as in a dream among writings on the walls, which it seems dimly but cannot divide into speech." George Eliot considers that in no nation has this spirit and adherence to the memories of the past been so highly developed and with such excellent results as in the Jewish people. It gives them a stronger bond and attachment for their religious and social life. That adherence to tradition and customs is an important factor in the development we know to be a fact and yet too close an adhering to the traditions of our ancestors may be a curse rather than a blessing to a nation's growth. The blind acceptance of tradition, which is merely the past experiences of people, often brings decadence to a nation rather than growth.

Fusion of the Races.

That the tendency of the nations is toward a fusion of races, she recognizes as a fact, and deplores

this condition, and her only hope is that their traditions and customs will not be fused into that of other nations too rapidly, as it takes considerable time for this fusion. The American nation has surely disproved this idea of fusion. Their traditions are being formed from the past experiences of many different nationalities. It is only since the Chinese have cast off some of their old traditions and taken on the more advanced customs of modern civilization that their real development morally, spiritually, and socially has begun.

George Eliot gives the change for betterment in the Italian race, as due to the gift of memory of the past and as its inspiring the future of Italy.

She considers the chief fault of the English as being the tendency to ignore the treasures that lie in her own national heritage and to grasp after what is foreign, even though it may be only an imitation of what is native. In connection with the subjection of weaker nations by stronger, the only point on which Englishmen are agreed is that England itself shall not be subject to foreign rule. This George Eliot affirms as the spirit of nationality in their veins. "Because there is something specially English which we feel to be supremely worth striving for, worth dying for, rather than living to renounce. Because we too have our share, perhaps a principal share in that spirit of separateness which has not yet done its work in the education of mankind, which has created the varying genius of nations, and like the Muses, is the offspring of memory."

Heredity and Environment.

Perhaps the two most prominent social factors, in regard to race, which are brought to our attention in the study of George Eliot is heredity and environment. Probably she is somewhat narrow in her conception of inheritance and does not sufficiently take into account other important factors. She gives rather arbitrary rules of heredity and does not vary to any extent from these fast rules. In her belief in the importance of heredity and environment she is quite modern in her viewpoint. The sociologist of today while giving due credit to the importance of inheritance, gives precedence to environment, in contrast to former ideas on the subject, in which heredity was the all important factor. The traditions and customs inherited from our ancestors play an all important part in her novels. She is inclined to give precedence to heredity over environment. In adhering to traditions, she was following closely the facts of the time. Family traditions were handed down from generation to generation, sometimes consciously but usually unconsciously.

There was a tendency for following the modern movement of progress, but George Eliot rather deplored this tendency, not that she did not believe in progress. If civilization had only improved with the progress, she would not have held it disfavor, but she could not but see progress was not bringing all the hoped for improvement in the race.

Even though her characters might attempt to shun the consequences of heredity, or perhaps it was unknown to them, as it was in "Daniel Deronda", heredity is all power-

ful, and we are sooner or later brought to realize its importance. Daniel Deronda is unconscious of his Jewish birth until toward the end of the novel, but throughout the story his heredity is being manifested. Though his early training and teaching would tend to lead him away from the Jewish race in his beliefs and ideals, heredity proved to be the strongest factor. Throughout the story his sympathy for his race was greater than his prejudice, and this sympathy expanded and grew until in the end when his parentage was made known to him, he was willing to forsake all for his people. All his early training was swept aside as of no consequence whatsoever. Daniel is a slave to circumstances, but he is preparing to answer the call to enthusiasm of Mordecai, the consumptive Jew, whose passions rest in the hope of a restored nationality even before all its bearings on himself is seen. For when it is revealed that Mirah is the sister of Mordecai, a new relation opens up between the three and still more when the revelation of his own Jewish birth is added that enthusiasm and the force of an inherited duty, Deronda can hesitate no longer. The call seems to be like an echo to the longings that his life and surroundings have prompted. Deronda by the circumstances of his education is prevented from representing any of the social distinctions of the Jew, yet his gravity of manner and his many sided sympathies were in all probability meant by the author to be taken as hereditary traits. Daniel makes excuse for his enthusiasm for a nationalized Jewish people, as being merely his desire to forward a political ideal. His racial

characteristics are manifesting themselves, although he is unconscious of the fact.

Mirah¹, an artless Jewish maiden, is fast bound to the little observations of her nation's religion and to a strict reverence for its customs. She bears in her blood and soul the fine results of the inherited instincts and ideas due to a hundred generations of culture, fervidly attached to her religion, because it was of one fiber with her affections and had never presented itself to her as a set of propositions; and also because it was the religion of her mother.

George Eliot thus conceives the Jews as the one race in history that can lay claim to immortality, because the earlier Ezras founded its national life upon a rock. They were strong in faith, strong in their inherited instincts and strong in defying circumstances. In this novel she has the best opportunity possible of developing hereditary traits and of showing their influence under all circumstances. The limitations imposed upon society as an individual aspect, as well as a national, is the underlying principle of the whole of *Daniel Deronda*. It is not only in this novel, but in all of her novels that heredity manifests itself. Heredity shapes the destiny of Tito Melema², *Romola*³, Gwendolen Harleth⁴, Maggie Tulliver⁵, Will Ladislaw⁶, Felix Holt⁷, and *Silas Marner*⁸ and many another character in her novels.

- 1 *Daniel Deronda*
- 2 *Romola*
- 3 *Romola*
- 4 *Middlemarch*
- 5 *The Mill on the Floss*
- 6 *Middlemarch*
- 7 *Felix Holt*
- 8 *Silas Marner*

The social theme of "Silas Marner" is the possibility of individual development under the conditions of heredity and environment. It shows the disastrous effect of an individual breaking off from his traditional surroundings when he leaves his old life and takes up a new one in a different community, therefore breaking his old ties and associations, he becomes a different nature. He was brought back into his natural relation with society through the medium of a little child. The story brings out the sociological fact that an individual cannot cut himself off from society without anything but an injurious result, for social unity depends upon co-operation of the group.

Racial Traits and Characterization.

Besides the Hebrew race, George Eliot treats of numerous other nationalities and races, although she does not give them such thorough study as she does the Jew, chiefly because she is more interested in their ambitions and ideals. She scarcely ever errs in making her characters true to their national and racial attributes, if one can rely upon the decision of critics. The Jews say her presentation of Jewish life is as true as if she had been reared a Jew. She is perfectly familiar with the customs, traditions and the environment of the people she writes about.

Tito Melema¹ is a veritable Greek, in his dislike of everything gross, sad and severe; a veritable Greek too in the skill with which he improved every favorable oppor-

1 Romola

tunity. It was this that made him so clever in turning a graceful compliment and in flinging back the witty retort. But how superficial all this was soon to become. In the crucial questions of his life he did not arrive on the field until after the action of the day was over. At the most important crisis, he was not aware that they were present, until after they had passed. The end and aim of his life was to extract the greatest sum of pleasure. We are only to note his steady and fatal progress toward that goal bearing in mind that the charity demanded by his race, his training and the age in which he lived, can scarcely cover all races and ages. This concentration of self in reckless pursuit of a personal gratification is the strongest expression of the Italian race, which is uniformly decried in "Romola", where it shows itself in the noble Romola, when she essays to throw off the trammels of a life that no longer answers to her ideal. The same idea is prolonged in the treatment of Savonarola¹, whose own personal aims and ambitions for the glory of a new Florence, prove to be his ruin.

It is only in "Romola" that we have a feeling that George Eliot is not keeping within the setting and surroundings of the time. Romola with her modernized views would do equally well in a nineteenth or even a twentieth century setting.

The time of Romola, the fifteenth century, is too remote for us to enter into the historical facts of the novel with much enthusiasm, but her treatment of the Italians, in bringing out their racial traits and instincts in connection with the spiritual conflict of the time is exceptional.

1 Romola

Catalina¹, in her passionate love of music is a good representative of the Italian nature and exemplifies their characterization, by her impulsive, affectionate, but intensely jealous disposition. Her musical genius, inherited from her father proves to be her good fortune; for when she is brought over from Italy by Lord and Lady Cheverel, they had no thought of bringing her up anything but a protege. They were too English and aristocratic to think of bringing her up as their daughter. But this "black-eyed monkey", as Lord Cheverel called her, soon won a place in his heart, while this Italian gift of song endeared her to Lady Cheverel. She would never have been affected merely by the child's lovable nature, for her emotions were too restricted for that.

Mordecai Cohen - Jew par excellence of George Eliot, embodies the inner life of Judaism. On Mordecai she has lavished her utmost skill in conceiving, presenting and vitalizing religious phenomena. Though he was considered with little regard by his own people, reformers who are captivated by one ideal must expect to meet with opposition from many members of the condemned and degraded race they ardently desire to serve. George Eliot endows Mordecai with the Hebraic fervor of imagination and intensity of will, while she emancipates him from the Hebraic narrowness of view.

Daniel Deronda's mother is indeed not George Eliot's ideal of a Jewess. In fact she makes of her a character unnatural in the traits and instincts of the Hebrew race, yet she does not make her absolutely devoid of admirable traits. She presents considerable contrast to

1 Sir Gilfil's Love Story.

Mirah, who seems to be represented as an ideal Jewess. In the princess Halm-Eberstein we have the revolt of a proud passionate nature against the restrictions and humiliations of her race, while in Mirah we have implicit faith and love in all the Jewish customs and traditions. Not only in this comprehensive resentment against the humiliation and restrictions of her religion, but in the peculiar warping and distortion given by embittered feeling to her domestic relations does the princess differ from Mirah. The personal charms of a strong will, the fascination and excitable temperament of genius, tyrannized over, and indeed usurped the place of natural affection. The princess gives away her child finally and forever, as she intends and believes in order to free him from the trammels of race and religion. When fate and dread of approach of death prove too powerful, even for the princess' strong self-will, and she at last summons her son to her presence in Geneva in order to reveal their relationship, he hurries to the interview in a mood of high wrought emotion, love, wonder, perplexity and enthusiasm all aflame within him. She remains embittered against her race even until her death.

In this character George Eliot merely wishes to indicate the last of those truly Jewish traits which she admires so and which were such an inborn instinct of the Jewish race. In fact it was the lack of the spiritual life, which goes to build up and develop the tradition of the race which were to be deplored in Daniel Deronda's mother.

Race versus the Individual.

George Eliot is inclined to develop the race at the expense of the individual. The individual is to be renounced for the sake of race. This idea is brought out in many of her characters and especially do we find it in her characterization of the Jew Mordecai. Of course we realize the importance of man living not for himself alone and yet all of his individualism should not be checked for which there is a tendency in the race idea. We fully realize though, that in bringing about the social good of the race, we bring about the social good of the individual, and her conception of the organic unity of the race is truly of great value.

In this conception she is merely contemporaneous with the modern thinkers of the day in their belief of the "greatest good to the greatest number." Social unity will undoubtedly bring about racial progress. But in developing this unity of race, there must be no attempt for segregation, for the developing of memories and traditions, but rather a strong intercourse between different races.

Race Antagonism.

Granted that the term race represents merely a hypothetical limit and not a concrete reality, it remains true that mankind is divided into communities that are concrete and real, every one regarding itself as an independent unit and every one working for its own advantage. Thus this doctrine of the independence of race seems to be the one erroneous mistake of George Eliot's teachings. This narrow self-regard attitude may be modified by the abolition of the dogma of racial regeneration, but for a complete re-

generation we must look to the sense of identity of interests; it is in fact this last that will destroy the feeling of race antagonism, a problem of great magnitude in the novel "Daniel Deronda" and in her essay "Theophrastus Such".

George Eliot gives this rather as a cause of the prejudices against the Jews than as a means of elimination. That she was justified to some extent in this view, one will admit. For in her time intercourse between the Jews and western European nations did seem to enhance the vices of the Jews. But time seems to have proved the contrary true, for there can be no doubt that the Jew's dispersion has made him a cosmopolitan. He possesses a faculty of adaptation. In George Eliot's time he was restricted by church and state to solitary occupation of money lender, which tended to develop a greed in his nature, but now he roams at will in every field. His powers have been developed by environment. But old time Jewish education undoubtedly had a wonderful influence and gave a stimulus to the race, which will ever be a power for good. Moral and religious forces too, springing from the home and parental teaching were active in shaping the young and giving them wholesome safe guards and balance wheels. There is every likelihood that Israel may enter more energetically in practical work, that its teaching in civilized lands may co-operate in the task of social and economic reform, that Jewish wealth and intellect may unite with the thoughtful and benevolent to help uplift mankind to a higher level of righteousness. Thus the old prejudice and antagonism against the Jews is gradually giving way to the modern attitude of equality of races.

Probably we are more justified today than ever before in saying that co-operation with other nations is for the benefit and welfare of a race, for surely the nations have a higher social organization and control than of preceding centuries.

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CHRONOLOGY OF GEORGE ELIOT'S WORKS.

TITLE	PRINTED
Scenes of Clerical Life	1857
Adam Bede	1859
The Mill on the Floss	1860
Silas Marner, the Weaver of Raveloe	1861
Romola	1862-3
Felix Holt, the Radical	1866
Middlemarch, a study of Provincial Life	1871-2
Daniel Deronda	1876
Impressions of Theophrastus Such	1879
Essays and Leaves from a Note Book	1884